

# **Planning, Aging & Matthews**

## *A Look At Matthews' Preparation For An Aging Population*



*Matthews Farmer's Market*

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Older & Younger Population Estimates and Projections for Matthews.....	5
What Do Retirees Look For?.....	7
Goals and Objectives for A Livable Community.....	10
Adapted from MetLife's <i>A Blueprint for Action: Developing A Livable Community For All Ages</i>	
I.    Housing.....	11
II.   Planning & Zoning.....	13
III.  Transportation.....	14
IV.  Health & Supportive Services.....	16
V.    Cultures & Lifelong Learning.....	18
VI.  Public Safety.....	20
VII.  Civic Engagement Opportunities.....	21
Sources.....	23

## Introduction

The imminence of the aging baby boom (*persons born between 1946 & 1964*) is upon us. The eldest of seventy-seven million baby boomers will begin to retire in 2011 at the age of 65, while many boomers who have decided to retire early will do so at the age of 62 this year (2008). Of those retiring today, forty-percent (40%) say they plan on continuing to work either part-time or in a consulting capacity. In order to stay active in the job market, many retirees are choosing to relocate to where their former employers are based. This is one of the reasons the South has become so popular among persons of retiring age from the New England and Great Lakes regions.

Communities with high income and rapid employment growth attract a large number of persons in their labor-force years, while at the same time deter older migrants due to the high cost of housing. The consequence is that population aging tends to occur in communities with fewer economic advantages. Most Americans say they would prefer to ‘age in place’ or continue to live in their own home, utilizing professional support services when necessary. Staying in the home long term requires massive coordination among care givers and community based services, something that neither the senior care industry, nor the medical community is prepared to deal with. Surveys of nursing home residents reveal chronic boredom, loneliness and lack of meaning.

Housing experts are forecasting the end of nursing homes because baby boomers are opting for other types of housing. They predict that in the place of nursing homes will be a plethora of choices that will allow seniors to live out their lives in home-like environments. As residents move in earlier and live longer, healthier lives, there will be increased pressures to meet ever-growing expectations, meaning; more services, amenities and choices.

Middle-aged boomers are largely unaware and unconcerned about their future supportive housing needs. Supportive housing is not high on their agendas; therefore it is not on the agenda of homebuilders. Three-quarters (3/4) of the nation’s seniors currently live in what can be termed ‘conventional housing’, which is not geared to the possibility of future disabilities. The ‘boomer’ generation is also opting for affordable housing such as low rent apartments, single-story townhomes and condominiums.

A new pattern in how retirees choose where to live is called *amenity migration* or mobility in search of leisure opportunities and attractive physical environments. Amenity migration has long been associated with good health and favorable economic status. However, many disabled and lower income retirees share the migration pattern typical of amenity migrants.

According to the AARP’s “*Aging, Migrations, and Local Communities*” survey conducted in 2006, when asked how vital a role the 60 and over age cohort play in specific areas of community life, majorities of county leaders across the nation say they play an ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ role in local religious life, business, social services and local government. Community leaders mention a range of contributions made by the retired community. Chief among them are the following: good pool of volunteer workers, experience others can learn from; economic benefits such as purchasing power, high taxable incomes, etc.; and solid/good/moral citizens. Leaders also mention a range of challenges created by the seniors in their counties including, healthcare/medical needs

of seniors, special transportation needs, the need for social and home care services for seniors and the fact that some are low income.

One of the concerns facing small towns is the loss of young adults and single populations. Towns that focus only on families within the town fail to address the needs of their young and single population. To have a well-rounded community, the presence of all age groups is necessary. Most small towns experience the loss of their young adult populations soon after they finish high school.

Many leave to attain a college education, enter the military, take jobs, and start families. Compared to rural areas, urban areas offer more educational and job opportunities. However, young adults will naturally move around, thus retaining a young population and recapturing them in a later stage in life are both equally important. There is also a widespread feeling among today's youth, that the only way to be successful is to leave your small town behind. To them, it seems that people in bigger towns and cities are more open minded and liberal.

One never runs out of entertainment and things to do in large towns and cities. Fortunately for Matthews, it is not a typical small town. Many colleges are located nearby, thus its youth need not travel far to further their education. Central Piedmont Community College, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Wingate University are all within a reasonable commuting distance. For those college-bound students that feel the need to stretch their wings, many of the country's top colleges, such as Wake Forest, Duke, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, are located in-state.

Another key factor is that Matthews is located in a metropolitan area, therefore an abundance of activities are all with a reasonable driving distance (or soon to be a rapid transit distance). Examples include attending a professional football game, a professional basketball game, plays, and concerts. Matthews' youth do not have to look very far for something to do with a Community Center that offers classes and events, such as teen scene, and the opening of the Sportsplex. Several bars in downtown Matthews, such as Kristopher's, offer older adults and single populations a place to grab a drink, socialize, and meet new people. With the abundance of parks and the coming greenway, all of Matthews' population, young and old, will easily be able to participate.

In terms of young adults, married and single, affordable housing is essential for maintaining their residency. Many young adults, whether in college or having recently finished, have tight budgets and consequently cannot afford high rents. Like the aging population, young adults also desire walkable communities where anything they need is within a short distance.

Building affordable, high density housing around the future rapid transit stations would be a great opportunity for those populations, young and old alike, that desire affordable housing, especially for those that may have to commute to Charlotte to work. Many people are realizing that more square feet does not necessarily mean a better house and the luxuries of a large house are possible in smaller homes, and as people begin to watch budgets and energy consumption, they are opting for savvy affordable housing.

## Older & Younger Population Estimates and Projections for Matthews

Though North Carolina does not have the largest elder population per capita, it does have one of the fastest growing. North Carolina was one of 12 states where the 65 and over population increased with a growth rate of 19% in 2003. As people move to Florida, one of the nation's hotspots for retirement, they are discovering that it isn't the ideal retirement location for them. It is often too hot or too far from family and friends, thus they relocate to North Carolina, a happy middle ground. North Carolinian's have come to call this the J-Turn in that people will retire to Florida, before moving farther north to North Carolina to complete half a U-Turn.

Some of the problems Matthews will face in the future will deal with a growing population and how to provide services, amenities, and address the needs of all age groups within the town. Between 1990 and 2000, Matthews experience an annual rate of population change of 4.8%, taking the population from 13,651 people in 1990 to 22,127 people in 2000. Currently, the town is looking into preparations that need to be made in the onset of the coming retirement of the Baby Boom generation and also the retention of younger and single populations. The Baby Boom generation is retiring earlier than their predecessors, before they reach 65, at an average age of 62. Thus, when referring to the "elderly," this is in reference to those people that are 60 years of age and older.

Similarly, when referring to "young adults" and "single" populations, this is to indicate those persons in Matthews that are 20 years of age and older. The age group with the most mobility in the United States is the age group of 20-24. Since persons that have not married or are non-family types are taken into consideration, the age group is extended to 34 years of age, adjusting for the fact that people are choosing to marry and bear children later in life than previous decades.

In 1990, the population of 60 and up was 1,351 and nearly doubled to 2,637 by 2000<sup>1</sup>. This means the annualized rate of change for the elderly population was 6.6%. Using the Geometric Rate of Change formula, it is possible to estimate the total

- Rate of Change Formula:  

$$r = \ln[(1990pop./2000pop.)/t]$$
- Geometric Rate of Change Formula:  

$$Pop. = 2000pop. (r+1)^t \quad r=rate \ \& \ t=years$$

population of Matthews and the Elderly Population in 2007. From there, the total population and Elderly Population for 2010 and 2020 can be projected as well.

However, these figures do *not* take into account migration. Thus, any persons retiring in to Matthews between 2007 and 2010 are not reflected in the figures. It is best to keep in mind that due to the migration of the Baby Boom Generation, these figures, more likely than not, *underestimate* the elderly population in Matthews. To add to this, the out-migration of younger populations as they leave for college, take jobs, enter the military, and start families will also make the elder population appear to be larger in that it is losing the younger base to balance it out.

Looking at the chart below (Table 1), the estimated total population for Matthews in 2007 was 30,783. Of that, 4,137 were 60 years of age and older. In other words, those

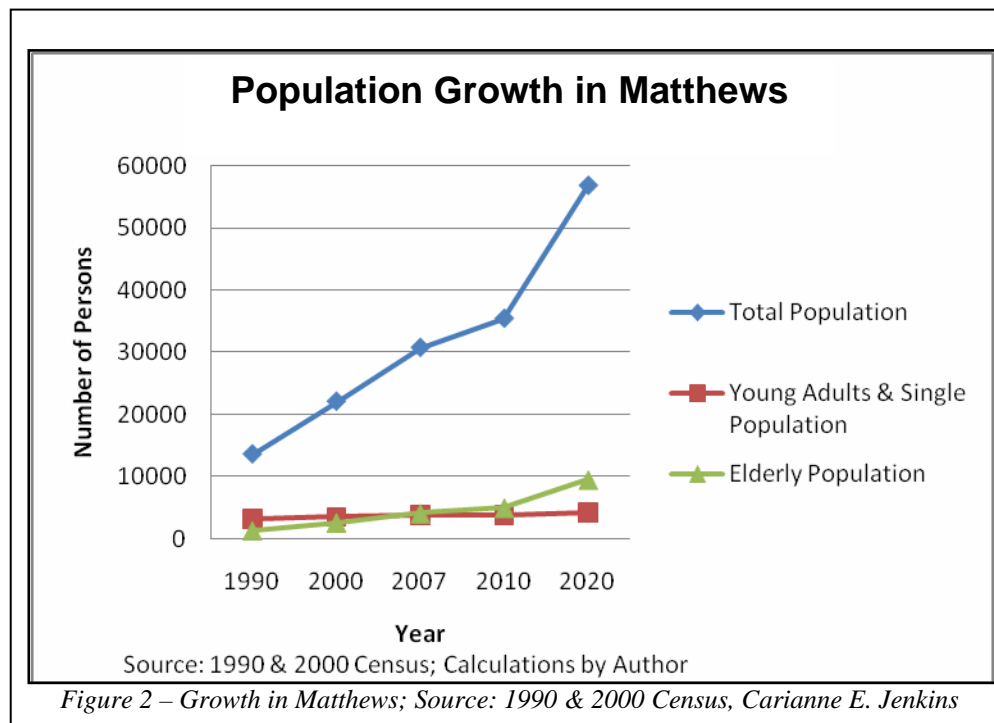
<sup>1</sup> For the basis of the calculations, the 1990 and 2000 census figures were used. The author produced all calculations.

citizens that were 60 years of age and older comprised approximately 13% of the population. Projections for the 2010 population are 35,463 persons overall and 5,017, or 14% of the population, being 60 years and older. By 2020, the prediction for the total population is 56,836 people with 17% (9,546) of the population being 60 years of age and older. In 2020, there will be almost 10,000 people in Matthews that are 60 and older. The good news is that leaves almost an entire decade to prepare.

Turning attention to the young adult and single population, there is a slow and steady growth in the town. The annualized rate of change for this age group is only .9%. From 1990 to 2000, the age group of 20-34 grew by only a few hundred people – from 3,226 in 1990 to 3,534 in 2000. The projected population for 2010 is 3,869 and 4,238, which equal 10% and 7.5% of the population, respectively. The bigger picture here is that that elderly population is projected to be twice as large as the youth and single population by 2020 (Figure 2).

**Population Estimates and Projections for Matthews, North Carolina**

	1990	2000	2007	2010	2020
<b>Total Population</b>	13651	22127	30783	35463	56836
<b>Youth &amp; Single (20-34)</b>	3226	3534	3766	3869	4238
<b>Elderly Population (60+)</b>	1351	2637	4137	5017	9546



## What Do Retirees Look For?

Before delving into what is it people look for in a retirement location, let us look first at *why* people that reach retirement age chose not to retire in the same place they lived before retirement.

The most prominent reasons movers age 60 and up decide to move are:

- Weather (31%)
- Lack of proximity to friends and family (19%)
- Financial considerations — Many leave communities due to high cost of living (10%) high local taxes (8%), and lack of affordable housing (3%)
- Unpleasant living conditions — traffic congestion (7%), high crime (5%), and overcrowding/overpopulation (5%)

Attention can be turned to look at what it is that people of retirement age are looking for in their new hometown and how Matthews compares with these desires. Older residences consistently cite several key components, such as affordable housing, a strong network of health and supportive services, low crime, good transportation access, and opportunities for civic engagement. It should come as no surprise that some of the reasons as to why retirees leave certain places and why they move to another overlap. For instance, they may leave their residency due to cold weather in search of warm weather. Over all, there are eleven major points that are taken into consideration when a retiree is looking to move:

1. *Safety*: Ability to walk through neighborhood safely; Ability to leave home for a few weeks and not dread break in

Matthews Police Department has an outstanding, dedication, and knowledgeable team. The crime rates for Matthews are either at or below the national average.

2. *Climate*: Reasonable, not too cold, hot, dry, or rainy

Being that it is located in the “sunbelt,” Matthews has ideal climate with four pronounced seasons. With warm summer temperatures and chilly winters, Matthews is a good location for people that are looking for a good middle ground between Florida and New England’s lack of seasons. The annual average precipitation at Matthews is 43.51 Inches

3. *Housing*: Quality and affordability

While Matthews has an abundance of quality housing, affordable housing is not given a lot of attention. Affordable housing would allow young adult and/or single populations and older populations to live comfortable and contribute to the Matthews community. While affordable housing has had a stigma attached to it in the past, today it has simply come to serve several diverse populations. Many young families demand affordable housing simply because money can be tight or the family is perhaps saving money for a home. Seniors whose children have left

for college are also moving into affordable housing realizing that they no longer need all the space their larger home offered or they no longer wish to care for a large property. Affordable housing near transit stations is optimal as more people choose to commute to work or run errands in lieu of the expense of using a personal vehicle. With a plethora of affordable housing options today, residents no longer have to choose between quality and affordability since they are synonymous. People want options, and not necessarily single unit detached housing or age restricted communities. Multifamily attached units, such as town homes and condominiums are extremely popular, not just for the elderly, but for young adult and single populations as well. Renting such units is flexible, less risky, easier, and offers a lifestyle alternative.

4. *Nourishment of Interests*: Availability of facilities for pastimes, cultural events and hobbies

Matthews currently has several festivities such as Matthews Alive!, Hometown Holidays, Summer Time Movies & Concerts, chili cook offs, Art in the Park, a Fourth of July Parade, and Arbor Day Celebration. It also has a Community Center that is utilized for a wide array of classes, such as dance, yoga, art, and certificate programs, plans for a future Sportsplex, and a proposed greenway system.

5. *Social Compatibility*: Common interests with neighbors, ability to make friends, people of similar cultural, social, and political background

Matthews is an extremely friendly town and since there is a mix of people that grew up here and those that moved from other places, there is a healthy mix of different cultural, social, and political backgrounds. Matthews offers several social outlets such as the Tennis and Golf clubs, the Levine Senior Center, churches, civic organizations, and the Siskey YMCA in order to make friends, find people with common interests, and stay active at the same time.

6. *Affordability*: Goods and services reasonably priced; Low state income taxes.

Matthews prides itself on having a competitive property tax rate compared to its neighbors and being able to provide excellent services and amenities.

7. *Distance from Family and Friends*: Location relative to friends and family

North Carolina is ideally situated, not too far south and not too far north, for people that wish to remain close to friends and family. Also, as many people move to metropolitan areas, Matthews is a great way to stay close to those friends in family members in Charlotte, Raleigh, or Greensboro with out living in urban setting.

8. *Jobs and/or Volunteer Opportunities*: Interesting volunteer or paid jobs;

Continuing Education programs at a local college

Small towns are defined by the connectivity of their community. Volunteering is a great way for people, young and older, to contribute to their communities.

There are a handful of volunteer programs available to the Matthews community



now, but more would be excellent for engaging the community further. With adequate transportation, seniors would be able to take classes at the CPCC campus.

9. *Transportation*: Bus transportation and train connections

Currently, there are five bus routes, 17, 27, 64x, 65x and 74x that service Matthews. With the future of connectivity via the rapid transit stations between Matthews and Charlotte, those dependent on public transportation will have a greater ability to move about then before. However, a better focus on local, possibly volunteer run, transportation, specifically for senior citizens would be a tremendous addition.

10. *A Lively and Safe Downtown*: Town center with restaurants, shopping, and places to meet friends

Matthews' downtown area provides a variety of specialty shops and restaurants to meet friends for lunch or just to browse. The Dilworth coffee house is a great place to sit and have a chat and the downtown hardware store will have just about anything you need for garden work or handy-man projects. The downtown area is also very safe and the center of many festivals.

11. *Your Favorite Vacation Destination*: Feasibility to live year round

While Matthews is not a vacation destination, it is working towards this goal – to attract tourists. With so many parks, the coming Sportsplex, a “quaint” downtown, a flowering arts and culture program, festivals, and proposed rapid transit stations linking the town with Charlotte, Matthews currently, and even more so in the future, will have much to offer tourists. For these reasons, Matthews will be a great location for retirement in that when family comes to town to visit their parents/grandparents, there will much for them to do and explore.

The satisfaction of residents age 60 and older also varies slightly based on whether they are a new resident or a long-term resident. For new residents 60 and up, the top five most important services/attributes are:

1. Opportunities to meet and make friends with other people age 60 and over
2. Low pollution, good air and water quality
3. Affordable cost of living
4. High quality local government services
5. Adult education opportunities

For long-term residences, the top five most important services/attributes are:

1. High quality local government services
2. Low pollution, good air and water quality
3. Low local taxes
4. Low crime
5. Employment opportunities

## **Challenges and Action Steps for A Livable Community**

Why should a town make plans in order to keep or attract their elder citizens? They are a huge asset and have much to contribute to the community. Elderly citizens are a wealth of knowledge and experience. By engaging them in the community, be it through volunteering or teaching classes, their knowledge and experience is bestowed upon the entire community. They too have the voice of experience that could be to the community's benefits on a plethora of issues. Not to mention, they also provide a residential tax base for the community as well.

The AARP defines a livable community to be "one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life." As it turns out, creating a livable community for the aging is not much different from creating a livable community for everyone. Many issues that affect the elderly often affect people of all ages. If these issues are addressed and adjusted, then the community will be well suited for people of all ages and there will be a better quality of life for the citizenry. Seven key areas need to be attended to in order to create a livable community for everyone. Each area has specific challenges to it and action steps that tackle each challenge. The seven key areas are: Housing, Planning & Zoning, Transportation, Health & Supportive Services, Culture & Lifelong Learning, Public Safety, and Civic Engagement Opportunities.

## I. Housing

*Enabling residents to age successfully in their homes and communities is critical to a community's ability to retain its tax base and preserve neighborhood stability. It is important to offer less expensive alternatives to institutionalized care. Many people, young adults and the elderly, would like to have the option of living in more compact homes or apartments that are easier to maintain and may be within walking distance of shops and services.*

### Goal 1: Provide more affordable housing options

- Objective: Institute property tax relief programs for all homeowners<sup>2</sup>
  - **Senior homestead exemptions:** property tax exemptions for homeowners that meet certain criteria from having to pay some or all of the property taxes (i.e. – exempt part of the assessed value of older adult homeowners' property from school taxes)
  - **Limiting assessed values:** limit or freeze increases in property assessment values thus protecting homeowners in areas with rapidly escalating real estate values. The assessed value only increases when the property ownership changes, after a renovation, or if previous assessment was incorrect.
  - **Property tax assistance:** Instead of changing tax code, develop programs to provide grants to assist low-income households who cannot pay property taxes.
  - **Private and Non-profit Programs:** These generally serve lower income households, such as NC Self-Help Loans, Habitat for Humanity.

Where Matthews Stands: Mecklenburg County already offers the Senior homestead exemptions and limiting assessed tax values. Homeowners must apply to receive these. Matthews should work closely with its citizens to make sure they are informed about these options and educate potential beneficiaries about available relief programs and offer assistance in completing applications. Also, advertise the use of Accessory Dwelling Units so that Matthew's citizenry are aware of this housing option.

<sup>2</sup> As with any tax issue, these tools require a careful balancing of costs and benefits. Any tool should be chosen based on a careful analysis of the community's demographics.

### Housing Characteristics of Matthews

	Characteristic	Population	Percentage
Household Types			
	Families	6,145	78.4%
	Live Alone	1,391	17.7%
	Householder 65 and Over	468	6%
	With Individuals 65 and Over	1,298	16.6%
Housing Units			
	1-Unit, Detached	6,574	79.5%
	Multiple Units, Attached	1,607	19.5%
Rent			
	Average	\$805.00	Approximately 38%
	Is 35% or More Percentage of Income	503	29.5%

*Figure 3 – Source: Census 2000; Carianne E. Jenkins*

## II. Planning & Zoning

*To age in place successfully, people need to have safe and easy access to services, amenities, and support networks (i.e. – friends and family). There are 3 components that should be available in a livable community. First, residents should be able to choose to live within walking distance of basic amenities, such as health facilities, drug stores, supermarkets and banks. Secondly, land use plans and zoning codes should enable and encourage housing in proximity to services and support the formation of intergenerational, mixed- income communities. Lastly, community planning should be a transparent, participatory process.*

Goal 1: Facilitate public support for new community designs that support aging in place

- Objective: Engage elder adults in the planning process
  - If local citizens realize that future residents could include their parents and grandparents, they may look more favorably on development proposals.
  - Educate the citizens about the needs of maturing populations through the planning process.
  - Use process of updating land use plans as an opportunity to educate citizens about the changes facing their community.

Where Matthews Stands: Matthews is working diligently to take the elder population into consideration in regards to the planning process, as evident by several new developments (i.e. – Erickson, Brookdale, etc).

Goal 2: Ensure that zoning regulations encourage a broad range of age-appropriate housing options

- Objective: Incorporate accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and senior-friendly housing in the zoning code
  - Educate citizens about the minimal impacts (traffic, parking) and benefits of ADUs
  - Promote ADUs to older residents, their relatives, and other citizens

Where Matthews Stands: While Matthews has already incorporated accessory dwelling units as a housing option, the promotion of ADUs needs to be more widespread so that citizens are aware of this option. There are also other housing options such as the Erickson's community, however as the elder population grows, more options need to be afforded to them.

### III. Transportation

*The process of aging often involves a deterioration of physical and functional skills that can make driving more difficult. Land use and transportation issues are intertwined and should be consciously dealt with in a closely coordinated fashion. Enabling older adults to remain mobile and engaged in their communities will require both new ways of transportation planning and design – such as innovative adaptations of transit services and the development of new volunteer driver programs – and a rediscovery of old ways of building streets and communities that balance the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and automobiles.*

#### Goal 1: Design pedestrian-friendly roads

- Objective: Use walkability audits to identify and prioritize pedestrian improvements

Where Matthews Stands: Several years ago, Matthews hosted a walkability session by Dan Burden. Matthews has a policy to build sidewalks on all new/improved streets, and the Town has built sections of sidewalk on at least one side of major roads. More recently, the Town has increased focus on planning to build greenways. The Town also applied for and received a grant from NCDOT to write a Comprehensive Bicycle Plan, adopted in 2006. The Town puts up signs at street stubs reading "future street connections" and/or "future greenway."

#### Goal 2: Ease the difficulty of the driving environment for older drivers to the best of the Town's ability

- Objective: Improve roadway design and signage.
  - Brighter stop lights and pavement markings
  - Larger lettering on street-name and directional signs
  - Protected left-turn signals
  - Convert two-way-stop intersections to four-way stop intersections

Where Matthews Stands: Since the Town only has a few traffic signals, which are mostly owned by NCDOT or the City of Charlotte, the Town could work with these entities to lobby for these improvements as necessary. Also, educating the public about how to use four-way stops is ideal since many people have not had to use them and as such are unaware how to.

- Objective: Work with responsible agencies to provide safety programs and refresher courses for older drivers
  - Driving skills assessments
  - Classes focusing on improving agility and other driving-related skills
  - A phone hotline providing advice to older drivers, caregivers, and family members
  - Help in identifying other mobility options and training older adults how to use new mobility options, such as public transportation

- Partnerships with occupational therapists and other specialists who can help assess and improve drivers' skills

Where Matthews Stands: Safety driver programs are already provided through the Levine Senior Center.

Goal 3: Work with CATS to foster customer-oriented community transportation options for older adults

- Objective: Make transit services more flexible and customer responsive
  - Allow same-day scheduling for patrons of paratransit services through computerized scheduling and dispatching systems
  - Extend service hours for paratransit and fixed-route transit services to weekend and evening times
  - Provide neighborhood circulator services, such as smaller shuttle buses serving senior centers
  - Purchase low-floor buses, which are easier for older adults to board and reduce waiting times

Where Matthews Stands: Through the Levine Senior Center, alternative forms of transportation are already provided.

- Objective: Support volunteer driver programs
  - A good volunteer program must provide a clear "job description" and thorough training, coordinate volunteers effectively, and secure insurance coverage
  - Can contact ITNAmerica (Independent Transportation Network) for help replicating model

Where Matthews Stands: The Levine Senior Center provides volunteer driver programs.

Transportation Characteristics of Matthews			
Commuting To Work	Characteristic	Population	Percentage
	Drive Alone	10,002	85.1%
	Public Transportation	108	0.9%

*Figure 4 – Source: Census 2000; Carianne E. Jenkins*

#### **IV. Adequate Health and Supportive Services**

*Access to quality health care – health care that is adequate, available, and affordable – is the most important priority for many older adults. The capacity to address health problems includes accessible hospitals and clinics, transportation services to and from health care facilities, and home- and community-based care services. The capacity to protect and improve residents' health and wellness includes an environment that encourages physical activity, preventive health programs such as health fairs and free screening, and creative efforts to engage older adults in the civic and cultural life of the community. Providing more support to caregivers is an important economic and social priority for employers and communities that rely on their skills.*

Goal 1: Make information about available services easier to locate and access

- Objective: Create a single point of entry for information about local services
  - Actively promote Mecklenburg County's "Just 1 Call" system ([www.partnershipforolderadults.org](http://www.partnershipforolderadults.org))

Where Matthews Stands: Due to the fact that Mecklenburg County's "Just 1 Call" system is already set up, it is not necessary for Matthews to do the same. The system could use more promotion through the Town's paper, website, flyers, etc.

Goal 2: Decrease health risks for older adults through improved diets and physical activity

- Objective: Support farmers' markets
  - Promote the Farmers Market through city newsletters, event guides, and other inexpensive means

Where Matthews Stands: Matthews takes great pride in their long-standing farmer's market. There is already private land available and it is situated in the heart of downtown. The farmer's market is also marketed throughout the town. Health and wellness classes are also provided through the Levine Senior Center. The Matthew Help Center offers food and nutrition services as well.

- Objective: Develop exercise and active living programs partnerships tailored to older adults' preference
  - Exercise classes: offer exercise classes that are tailored specifically to older adults, such as swimming programs, osteoporosis prevention classes, and line dancing
  - Walking programs: Encourage walking by sponsoring group programs and distributing pedometers, enabling participants to track their exercise
  - Developing and promoting parks and trails: walking in parks and on trails is a favored means of recreation for older adults. Local governments can promote are trails by distributing map and other materials that make these amenities easy to find and use



Where Matthews Stands: Matthews has proactively created parks and trails for the towns citizens to use, which are great for cardiovascular exercise for older citizens. The Town has also already addressed current and projected facility needs in the Recreation Master Plan to provide adequate fields, courts, outdoor areas, trails, and specialized needs such as a swimming pool, which will all greatly enhance not just the older populations, but also the entire population of Matthews' health and activity. The Crews Road Recreation Center and Siskey YMCA are also great resources to be used by aging populations to stay fit. Further, Matthews Tennis, Swim, and Golf Club are wonderful examples of activities that keep not just seniors, but Matthews' citizens active physically and socially. Once the trails have been built, providing maps for Matthews' citizens would be a great idea. Also, progress is currently being made through the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Fit City efforts. The Levine Senior Center also offers classes focusing on strength and cardio training, water aerobics, yoga, Pilates, floor, and chair aerobics.

**Goal 3: Improve access to health care**

- Objective: Improve access to medical transportation
  - Work with local transit agency to adjust routes so that older adults have easier access to health care services
  - Create a brokerage service connecting health care consumers with the most appropriate available transportation services
  - Encourage vehicle sharing among health institutions, human service providers, and other organizations with fleets that may be used at different times

Where Matthews Stands: Currently, there is no link between medical services and transportation. However, the Matthews Help Center offers medical assistance, crisis assistance, and health related services.

**Matthews Population in Need of Health and Supportive Services**

	Characteristic	Population	Percentage
Grandparents as Caregivers			
	Living in Household With Grandchildren	240	100%
	Responsible for Grandchildren	86	35.8%
Disability Status			
	5 to 20 Years With a Disability	290	5.2%
	21 to 64 With a Disability	1,243	9.5%
	65 & Up With a Disability	902	43.6%

Figure 5 – Source: Census 2000; Carianne E. Jenkins

## **V. Culture and Lifelong Learning**

*Lifelong learning and participation in cultural and recreational activities are important for older adult health and communities' quality of life and economic competitiveness. Communities can use cultural assets such as public libraries and local universities to provide new lifelong learning opportunities for older adults. Providing these opportunities can build a powerful advocacy voice in the community for more funding to libraries, parks, and schools. Older adults participating in weekly arts programs reported better health, fewer doctors visits and less medication usage.*

Goal 1: Create more community-based arts, culture, and enrichment programs that target older adults.

- Objective: Provide a wide range of programs to enable older adults to contribute to the cultural life of the community.
  - Create partnerships between artists/cultural organizations and agencies serving older adults.
  - Train artists in residence and other teachers by gerontologist and other professionals that understand the needs and abilities of older adults.
  - Create an asset-based approach that taps into older adults unique strengths, such as intergenerational oral history programs.
  - Engage older adults in planning programs.

Where Matthews Stands: The Town of Matthews Newsletter is a great asset for advertising classes, programs, and special events. Furthermore, the website, [www.matthewsfun.com](http://www.matthewsfun.com) meets the needs of all the Town's citizens, especially since they can access the internet at the Matthews Branch of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Levine Senior Center offers several visual and performing arts classes for the elderly as well as educational seminars.

Goal 2: Create arts and culture programs that appeal to and engage the talents of diverse older populations.

- Objective: Provide opportunities for intergenerational learning around arts and cultural production.
  - Encourage partnerships between theaters, artists, and community organizations to fund and increase the relevance of arts and cultural programs in the community.

Where Matthews Stands: Matthews already provides several classes that older adults can engage in, from dancing, yoga, meditation, certified classes, financial planning, and conversational Spanish. Oil painting, water coloring, and classes about writing your own autobiography are great classes for older populations. Also, the Levine Senior Center that currently appeal to service the elderly.

As the aging population grows in Matthews, more athletic activities and leagues need to be started for particular age groups. Furthermore, since retirees are typically on a

fixed income, the Town should create plans, such as scholarship programs (as with lower-income families) so a fixed or low income does not refrain seniors from enjoying programs.

Goal 3: Keep older adults up-to-date with advances in technology

- Objective: Increase technology-training opportunities for older adults
  - Work with library and community center to create computer centers that are conducive to the learning styles of older adults
  - Hire older adults as teachers, use larger fonts in class, and create alternatives to tests in measuring participants progress
  - Look into partnering with national organizations such as SeniorNet to set up computer learning centers

Where Matthews Stands: The Levine Senior Center currently offers technology classes.

## **VI. Public Safety**

*The perception and reality of a safe environment are important for enabling residents to remain active and engaged in the community as they age. These fears can stem from lack of communication between citizens and law enforcement. Also, elder abuse is becoming an increasingly recognized problem in the United States as elderly people are left in the care of people that are unable or unfit to care for them.*

### **Goal 1: Address common concern about safety of neighborhoods**

- Objective: Encourage Neighborhood Watch programs
  - Neighborhood Watch programs can benefit older residents by reducing opportunities for crime
  - Program can be used as civic engagement tool for adults who have a wealth of knowledge about their neighborhoods and keep a watch out for the neighborhood

Where Matthews Stands: Neighborhood Watch programs are ideal for small communities and provide more than just safety. Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) are great places to start in that the more the elderly are involved in watching and keeping their neighborhoods safe, the safer they feel.

- Objective: Create mail carrier alert programs
  - If mail carrier notices that a resident's mail has not been collected, a third party, designated by the resident, is contacted so that he/she can check up on them

Where Matthews Stands: No mail carrier alert program currently exists.

### **Goal 2: Address growing national concerns about elder abuse**

- Objective: Train law enforcement officials to detect and report elder abuse
  - Familiarize law enforcement with Adult Protective Services procedures
  - Demonstrate effective reporting procedures
  - Clarify the laws of governing elder abuse

Where Matthews Stands: While elder abuse is currently not a major problem in Matthews, it should continue to be monitored to make sure the status stays that way.

## **VII. Civic Engagement and Volunteer Opportunities**

*A livable community for all ages engages older adults in meaningful work for the common good. Retired individuals have the opportunity to use the skills and experience they've developed over time to serve their communities directly and take leadership roles. Older adults are great assets to communities, especially when utilized as mentors, tutors, coaches, teachers, and role models as well as in other roles that benefit children and youth. Young people who participate in intergenerational programs show measurable improvements in school attendance and attitudes towards school while older adults benefit through an increased sense of meaning and purpose to their lives.*

Goal 1: Provide a broad array of civic engagement options for older adults

- Objective: Support intergenerational learning programs
  - Create tutoring and mentoring programs
  - Place volunteering older adults as assistants in local school's (i.e. – Butler High, Crestdale Middle, Crown Point Elementary, Matthews Elementary, and Elizabeth Lane Elementary)

Where Matthews Stands: Currently, no mentoring and tutoring programs exist to connect elder adults with school age children.

- Objective: Start senior academies
  - Develop community partnerships for planning curriculum, recruiting faculty, locating meeting places, and identifying volunteer opportunities
  - Design course offerings with flexibility to attract a large number of participants
  - Ensure that meeting sites are physically accessible for people of all abilities.
  - Sustain participants' involvement (i.e. – reunions, alumni programs)

Where Matthews Stands: Senior Academies are already in place through the Levine Senior Center.

- Objective: Establish asset mapping
  - Form community group to assess Town's skills, connections, and other special capacities of residents, groups, and businesses through written surveys, face-to-face interviews, and other means
  - Create a detailed map of these assets (i.e. – using GIS) so that the town can utilize these resources, especially those of older adults

Where Matthews Stands: Currently, when people register with the Levine Senior Center, their talents and abilities are recorded for future use. These should be mapped in GIS so that they are easier to locate.

### Populations in Need of Engagement and Opportunities

	Characteristic	Population	Percentage
Income			
	Families Living in Poverty	169	2.7%
	18 & Up Living in Poverty	699	7.7%
	65 & Up Living in Poverty	163	1.8%
Marital Status			
	Never Married	3,331	19.6%
	Separated, Divorced or Widowed	2,055	12%

Figure 6 – Source: Census 2000; Carianne E. Jenkins

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